

Amendments to the Claims:

This listing of claims will replace all prior versions, and listings, of claims in the application:

Please amend the claims as follows:

IN THE CLAIMS:

1. (currently amended) Food holding apparatus for holding pre-cooked food at a selected holding temperature, said apparatus comprising:

a cabinet having at least one holding compartment therein;

pre-cooked food in the holding compartment, said food having been previously cooked in a cooking appliance;

at least one infrared ~~radiant~~ heat source spaced above the food a distance less than 12 inches for delivering infrared ~~radiant~~ heat to the food; ~~and~~

said infrared heat source being selected from the group of (i) ceramic infrared heat source, (ii) halogen infrared heat source, (iii) quartz infrared heat source, and (iv) infrared heat lamp; and

a control mechanism for varying the amount of infrared ~~radiant~~ heat delivered by the infrared heat source to the food during a duration of holding time to maintain the food at said selected holding temperature.

2. (currently amended) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said ~~distance is less than 10 in.~~ control mechanism is programmed to operate said at least one infrared heat source in successive time-based cycles.

3. (currently amended) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim ~~1~~ 2 wherein said ~~distance is less than 8 in.~~ each of said time-based cycles comprising a first time interval during which the at least one infrared heat source is activated to deliver infrared heat and a second time interval during which the heat source is not activated.

4. (previously presented) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said distance is less than 6 in.

5. (previously presented) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said distance is less than 4 in.

6. (previously presented) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said distance is less than 2 in.

7. (currently amended) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 1 ~~wherein said distance is in the range of 0.25-10 in.~~ further comprising a glass panel between said at least one infrared heat source and said pre-cooked food.

8. (previously presented) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said distance is in the range of 0.25-8 in.

9. (previously presented) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said distance is in the range of 0.25-6 in.

10. (previously presented) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said distance is in the range of 0.25-4 in.

11. (previously presented) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said distance is in the range of 0.25-2 in.

12. (currently amended) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 1 further comprising partitions in the cabinet dividing the cabinet into a plurality of separate, ~~thermally isolated~~ holding compartments, at least one tray in each of said holding compartments holding pre-cooked food therein, said at least one ~~radiant~~ infrared heat source comprising a plurality of heat sources in said compartments spaced above the pre-cooked food in respective trays a distance less than 12 inches for delivering ~~radiant~~ infrared heat to the food, and said control mechanism being adapted for controlling operation of the heat sources independent of one another whereby the temperature in each compartment may be independently controlled.

13. (currently amended) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said control mechanism is operable to vary the ~~radiant~~ infrared heat delivered by said at least one heat source to the food through said duration of holding time, said duration comprising a first phase at which ~~radiant~~ infrared heat is delivered to the food by the heat source at a first level to permit said pre-cooked food to cool down to said selected holding temperature, and a second phase at which ~~radiant~~ infrared heat is delivered to the food by the heat source at a second level higher than said first level to hold the food at said selected holding temperature.

14. (currently amended) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 13 wherein said duration of holding time further comprises a third phase at which ~~radiant~~ infrared heat is delivered to the food at a third level less than said second level to maintain said pre-cooked food at said holding temperature.

15. (currently amended) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said control mechanism comprises at least one sensor in the compartment for detecting a characteristic indicative of the temperature of the pre-cooked food in the compartment, the control mechanism being responsive to signals from said sensor to vary the amount of ~~radiant~~ infrared heat delivered by the heat source to the food to maintain the food at said selected holding temperature.

16. (previously presented) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 15 wherein said sensor is a temperature sensor for detecting the temperature of a surface in the compartment.

17. (currently amended) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 15 wherein said sensor is operable to detect ~~radiant~~ infrared energy emitted by said pre-cooked food.

18. (currently amended) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 1 wherein said control mechanism is programmed to operate said heating source according to a predetermined protocol to vary said ~~radiant~~ infrared energy delivered to said food depending on the type of pre-cooked food placed in the compartment.

19-32. (previously cancelled)

33. (currently amended). A food holding oven for holding pre-cooked food at a selected food holding temperature, said food holding oven comprising:

a cabinet having a front, a back, and an interior space;

a plurality of separate, thermally isolated holding compartments in the interior space of the cabinet for holding pre-cooked food, said holding compartments comprising a first row of compartments and a second row of compartments, the first row being arranged above the second row;

each compartment having an open front end at the front of the cabinet for placement of the pre-cooked food in the compartment and removal of said pre-cooked food from the compartment;

at least one ~~radiant~~ infrared heat source in each holding compartment of said plurality of holding compartments for delivering ~~radiant~~ infrared heat to the pre-cooked food in the compartment; and

a control mechanism for varying the amount of ~~radiant~~ infrared heat delivered by said at least one infrared heat source to the pre-cooked food during a duration of holding time to maintain the pre-cooked food at said selected holding temperature.

34. (previously presented) A food holding oven as set forth in claim 33 wherein each compartment receives a tray for holding the pre-cooked food and has an open back end at the rear of the cabinet for placement of a respective tray in the compartment and removal of said tray from the compartment.

35. (previously presented) A food holding oven as set forth in claim 33 wherein the front ends of said compartments are doorless and remain open during a heating operation.

36. (currently amended) A food holding oven as set forth in claim 33 wherein said control mechanism is operable to vary the ~~radiant~~ infrared heat delivered by said at least one heat source to the pre-cooked food through a duration of holding time, said duration comprising a first phase at which ~~radiant~~ infrared heat is delivered to the pre-cooked food by the heat source at a

first level to permit said pre-cooked food to cool down to said selected holding temperature, and a second phase at which ~~radiant~~ infrared heat is delivered to the pre-cooked food by the heat source at a second level higher than said first level to hold the pre-cooked food at said selected holding temperature.

37. (currently amended) A food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 36 wherein said duration of holding time further comprises a third phase at which ~~radiant~~ infrared heat is delivered to the pre-cooked food at a third level less than said second level to maintain said pre-cooked food at said holding temperature.

38. (currently amended) A food holding oven as set forth in claim 33 wherein said control mechanism is programmed to operate said at least one heat source according to a predetermined protocol to vary the amount of infrared heat delivered to the pre-cooked food depending on the type of pre-cooked food placed in the compartment.

39. (previously presented) A food holding oven as set forth in claim 33 wherein said control mechanism comprises an operator input device for selecting a type of pre-cooked food placed in a respective compartment, and wherein said control mechanism is programmed to operate a respective heat source to heat the pre-cooked food in said respective compartment to a pre-programmed selected holding temperature and to hold the pre-cooked food at said pre-programmed selected holding temperature.

40. (currently amended) A food holding oven as set forth in claim 33 ~~further comprising pre-cooked food in each compartment, the pre-cooked food having been previously cooked in a cooking appliance, each radiant infrared heat source being spaced above the pre-cooked food a distance less than 12 inches for delivering radiant infrared heat to the pre-cooked food~~ wherein said infrared heat source is selected from the group of (i) ceramic infrared heat source, (ii) halogen infrared heat source, (iii) quartz infrared heat source, and (iv) infrared heat lamp.

41. (previously presented) A food holding oven as set forth in claim 33 wherein said control mechanism controls the operation of the heat sources independent of one another whereby the food holding temperature in each compartment may be independently controlled.

42. (new) A food holding oven as set forth in claim 33 wherein said control mechanism is programmed to operate said infrared heat source in successive time-based cycles.

43. (new) A food holding oven as set forth in claim 42 wherein each of said time-based cycles comprising a first time interval during which the heat source is activated to deliver infrared heat and a second time interval during which the heat source is not activated.

44. (new) A food holding oven as set forth in claim 33 further comprising a glass panel between said infrared heat source and said pre-cooked food.

45. (new) Food holding apparatus for holding pre-cooked food at a selected holding temperature, said apparatus comprising:

- a cabinet having at least one holding compartment therein;
- pre-cooked food in the holding compartment, said food having been previously cooked in a cooking appliance;
- at least one infrared heat source spaced above the food a distance less than 12 inches for delivering infrared heat to the food; and
- a control mechanism programmed for operating said at least one infrared heat source in successive time-based cycles during a duration of holding time to maintain the food at said selected holding temperature.

46. (new) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 45 wherein each of said time-based cycles comprising a first time interval during which the at least one infrared heat source is activated to deliver infrared heat and a second time interval during which the heat source is not activated.

47. (new) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 46 wherein said control mechanism is further programmed for varying a length of said first time interval from one time-based cycle to another time-based cycle.

48. (new) Food holding apparatus for holding pre-cooked food at a selected holding temperature, said apparatus comprising:

a cabinet having at least one holding compartment therein;

pre-cooked food in the holding compartment, said food having been previously cooked in a cooking appliance;

at least one infrared heat source spaced above the food a distance less than 12 inches for delivering infrared heat energy directly to the food;

said infrared heat source being selected from the group of (i) ceramic infrared heat source, (ii) halogen infrared heat source, (iii) quartz infrared heat source, (iv) resistance heating element embedded in magnesium oxide, and (v) infrared heat lamp; and

a control mechanism for varying the amount of infrared heat energy delivered by the infrared heat source to the food during a duration of holding time to maintain the food at said selected holding temperature.

49. (new) Food holding apparatus as set forth in claim 48 further comprising a panel transparent to said infrared heat energy positioned between said at least one heat source and said pre-cooked food.